

## Olivet's Position on Same-Sex Marriage

Olivet's Mission, Vision and Values statement contains our position on marriage; it states...“We teach that a full sexual relationship belongs within the boundaries of a publicly committed marriage between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31, Exodus 20:14, Romans 1:26-27).”

When we as a church speak on this issue we must remember that we are called to be ambassadors of Christ. *“So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making His appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!” 2Co 5:20.”* When we are in conversation on this issue we need to remember three things. One, Jesus commands us to love all people – when Christians hate, we lose our moral center and mission. Two, All people – straight and gay – are sinners in need of a Savior. Third, according to the Bible, a full sexual relationship belongs inside the boundaries of a marriage between one man and one woman.

We love and welcome all people at Olivet, including those who identify themselves as gay. Olivet is a hospital for sinners, not a hangout for morally perfect saints. We have no desire to become a "holy huddle" of self-deceiving, self-righteous, legalistic, religious bigots who oppress and hate others simply because their sin is of a sexual nature.

Without hesitation, we love people who are gay, and we reject the false assumption that love comes with the qualifier of full agreement with all behavioral choices. Most parents love their children more than life itself, but these same loving parents don't bless, endorse, or agree with every aspect of their children's behavior. Best friends rarely endorse all facets of each other's behavior, yet their love for one another is not called into question. Jesus commands us to follow his teaching and example to love all people, without exception, and our love for people who are gay continues even when we announce God's law regarding same gender sexual behavior.

A number of local churches have changed their policy to allow same sex marriages at their churches. They state that the Bible's teaching on sexual boundaries is contextual, and therefore not applicable to our modern world. We disagree with their position. Some laws in the Bible are clearly "contextual" (like "don't eat pork"), meaning they are written for the good of that particular community at a particular time. Other biblical commands are "timeless" (like "love one another"), meaning they are intended for and applicable to all people at all times.

How can we tell the difference? It's not that difficult. Biblical laws that are repeated consistently across different times and places stand out as unchangeable and timeless. These laws are even more assuredly timeless if Jesus does not refer to them, challenge them, or offer a new revelation regarding them. When Jesus disagreed with the narrow

and legalistic interpretations made by the religious leaders of his day, he routinely brought those laws into the light for a more timeless interpretation. For instance, Jesus says, "You have heard the law that says, 'An eye for an eye' (contextual) ... but I say, 'Turn the other cheek' (timeless)." Matthew 5:38-39 A few verses later, Jesus says, "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy' (contextual) ... but I say, 'Love your enemies' (timeless)." Matthew 5:43-44

Jesus had ample opportunity to do the same kind of timeless interpreting of Old Testament contextual laws regarding sexuality and marriage, but he did not, nor did he raise the issue of same gender sexual behavior as something that could – in some relationships – be considered a God blessed option. In fact, when the issue of marriage and sexual boundaries was brought to Jesus, he affirmed the Old Testament law established by God at the creation of the first human beings:

*"Haven't you read the Scriptures? They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female and this explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united as one.'" Matthew 19:4-6 (see also Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31)*

Clearly, then, here we have a mandate from God, established at the beginning of creation, affirmed by Jesus in the Gospels, and Paul in the epistles: God created the gift of sex to be shared within the boundaries of a marriage between a man and woman. Throughout the Bible, there is not one hint of any kind of God blessed alternative when it comes to sexual intimacy. So, this is not a contextual law, but a timeless law that still applies to us, and our world.

While our culture continues to debate whether or not a person is "born gay," the biblical reality is that it doesn't matter. Galatians 5:22-23 makes it clear that one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is "self-control." That doesn't mean it's easy to resist a human urge. Nor does it mean that those who act on a same gender sexual desire have done anything worse than those who are involved in some other kind of sinful sexual behavior (adultery, lust, pornography, promiscuity, treating human beings like sexual objects, etc.). Even a casual reader of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount must come to terms with the fact that almost all of us are guilty of sinful sexual behavior (Matthew 5:28), and therefore ought to be careful not to flick the speck out of our neighbor's eye when we have a log in our own (Matthew 7:4-6). But being tempted to sin, or more specifically having been born with a desire to engage in same gender sexual behavior, does not mean we are powerless to stop short of acting on that orientation. The urge to get involved sexually with another human being, even when love is present, does not prove the rightness of the behavior.

For some people they feel that this issue is a civil rights issue. That is also what half of the Supreme Court decided on June 26, 2015. In some ways, yes. It is clearly true that

people who are gay have far too frequently been criticized, ridiculed, verbally abused, or worse by religious people who misunderstand God's Word, and misuse the Bible to try and make their "case" for bigotry. That's unjust.

Historically, religious bigots also misused Scripture to support slavery, suppress women's rights, or force African-Americans to live as second-class citizens. In each case, they applied biblical texts unfairly or dishonestly to further an unjust ideology. Over time, the church dismissed these biblically unsupportable claims, leading the charge for change and justice. Without the leadership of Christians inspired by God's Word, the abolition of slavery would not have occurred when it did, women would not have been given the right to vote when they did, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s would not have happened the way it did.

Some claim that marriage equality is the new justice issue for our day, and the church will come along and eventually bless all same gender sexual behavior. While similarities exist, it's not the same. Yes, the church has an obligation to stand up for anyone who is oppressed for race, gender, ethnicity, or even sexual orientation. But that does not mean the church is also called to stand in favor of same gender sexual behavior, which the Bible does not endorse. This is an important distinction. Some would prefer to blur the lines between justice/oppression and morality/behavior when it comes to marriage equality and same gender sexual behavior, but that's not honest or biblically faithful. The oppression of people who are gay is a justice issue that the church must stand against, but same gender sexual behavior is a moral issue that the church does not have the authority to change with a vote ... or due to cultural peer pressure.

So, at Olivet, we teach that oppression of people who are gay is unjust and sinful. We also teach that no one in the church, even those who are oppressed, has a free pass from God to bless sinful behavior, and mistake morality for justice.

With the decision from the Supreme Court, some people feel that we should change our position on same sex weddings. We state that the culture is not an authority for the church. We do not decide what to teach at Olivet based on political or social worldviews, popular opinion, or rapidly changing cultural norms. The only foundation for our teaching as a church is God's Word. If we attempt to minimize the authority of God's Word, or modify it, we lose the essence of our faith.

We have posted our position on this hot button issue because the Bible is not silent about sex, so we can't be silent or pretend that God really has nothing relevant to say. Same gender sexual issues, like it or not, are a hot topic in the world today. The church has a responsibility to participate – not emphasize, but participate – in the conversation, or run the risk of becoming irrelevant and, worse, unfaithful.

We know that some people feel that Olivet does not take a strong enough condemnation of gay people and on the other hand some feel we are too strict in our teaching. All we can say is, God bless them and their opinion but we will be who God has called Olivet to be. God didn't put Olivet here to be popular, or to become a pawn for politically motivated agendas, on the right or left. He put us here to be faithful. Those who believe that the primary mission of the church is to win a culture war are (on either side of this issue), with all due respect, missing the point of Christianity and inflicting damage to the mission of the church.

The world tends to see things simplistically, and when it comes to this issue, the world insists that there are only two views: either you love gay people by agreeing with their behavior, or you hate gay people by disagreeing with their behavior. Jesus would offer a third and more faithful alternative, and one that we embrace at Olivet:

Love people. For the sake of love, do not bless sinful behavior. Remember that all of us are sinners in need of a Savior, and our only hope for salvation depends on God's grace, not our good behavior.

*"We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins." Romans 3:22-24*